

Gov. Christie, Cardinal George: in the spotlight

Robert McClory | Jan. 22, 2014 NCR Today

The top executives of two major U.S. institutions have been in the news this month reacting to serious problems occurring under their jurisdiction. Both have felt public pressure, and both have reacted in ways that are interesting both in their similarities and differences. The two are Chris Christie, governor of New Jersey, and Cardinal Francis George, archbishop of Chicago.

Christie has been in a hot spot almost daily because of revelations that a senior aide and several political appointees had forced days of serious traffic jams over the George Washington Bridge as retribution against a political foe.

George, on the other hand, was in the spotlight because of [the release of documents](#) [1] relating to the sexual misconduct of some 30 priests -- documents that had raised questions about the church's response to allegations of abuse.

Both Christie and George said whatever happened, it wasn't their fault. Said Christie: "I had no knowledge or involvement in this issue, in its planning or its execution, and I am stunned by the abject stupidity that was shown here." George was so anxious to distance himself from any suspicion that he got to the point in the second sentence of his lengthy statement: "All these incidents were reported over the years to civil authorities and claims have been mediated civilly. Almost all the incidents happened decades ago, perpetrated by priests whom neither I nor many younger clergy have ever met or talked to."

Nevertheless, Christie apologized about what happened at the bridge. "I believe that all of the people who were affected by this conduct deserve this apology. ... I also need to apologize ... for my failure as the governor of this state to understand the true nature of this problem sooner than I did."

George did not apologize. In fact, he spent almost half of his statement discussing the case of a priest who wasn't even among the 30 whose records were released. He went into detail about Daniel McCormack's wonderful track record as a priest before he was arrested in 2005 amid charges of abuse, then released. He was rearrested in 2006, when the evidence against him became overwhelming.

It was reported in the media that the archdiocesan review board urged that McCormack be removed from duty after his first arrest and that George had overruled the board. Not so, said the cardinal. "From the time he was arrested and released to the time he was arrested a second time and eventually pled guilty, no one involved in investigating the allegation, not even the review board that struggled with their justified concerns, told me they thought he was guilty."

If there is blame, he said, it lies elsewhere: "The investigation was hampered because the various offices involved did not consistently share what they knew with each other or with me. Nor did the civil authorities share with the archdiocese what they came to know in their investigations."

Christie fired a senior aide and said others involved in the closing would be "held responsible." George did not

indicate any action against anyone, not even the review board. "A mistake is not a cover-up," he said.

In both these situations, one unanswered question looms: How could they not have known? How could so many people be involved in causing serious traffic congestion on the New Jersey bridge for five days and the governor, who prides himself on being a hands-on manager, never hear a word? Or how could so much damaging evidence be amassed over many months in the McCormack case and the bishop who once had such high hopes for the priest did not know what was going on and did not inquire about the status of the case?

One more difference: Christie explained his position during an almost-two-hour press conference. George authorized Bishop Frank Kane, the archdiocesan vicar general, to speak in his place at the press conference concerning the release of new information on abusive priests. George's remarks appeared in the archdiocesan paper with copies available in all the parishes.

It's all quite mysterious.

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